

RHODE ISLAND DEPARTMENT OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION
NON-TRADITIONAL CERTIFICATION PROGRAM GUIDELINES

Adopted by Board of Regents February 12, 2004

INTRODUCTION

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, in an effort to continue to meet the increasing demand for highly qualified teachers in Rhode Island Schools, who can teach at the level of the Rhode Island Beginning Teacher Standards, convened a design team in January 2000 to develop a non-traditional certification program. The design team included representatives from higher education, teacher professional associations, school district administrators, district and state providers of professional development, the Business Education Roundtable, and the Annenburg Institute and citizens at large. In August 2001, the committee completed its work and provided the Department with a draft guide for the approval of non-traditional certification programs in Rhode Island. The Commissioner's Policy Consortium reviewed and discussed the draft guide document. As a result of these discussions, the Office of Higher Education reviewed the document and developed a revised proposal for non-traditional certification for teachers in documented high need areas. This proposal was presented to the Policy Consortium in May 2002 and the certification Policy Advisory Board in June 2002. The Board then received a request from the Board of Regents for Elementary and Secondary Education to develop a non-traditional certification program to be presented to the Commissioner and Regents upon completion. The Certification Policy Advisory Board began to review and revise the proposal presented to them by the Office of Higher Education at its September 2002 meeting. This document now represents the work of the Certification Policy Advisory Board and provides a design for a non-traditional certification program in Rhode Island that is supported by Board members.

Although higher education program providers are encouraged to creatively design their own approaches for non-traditional programs, these programs must include intensive initial classroom teaching with trained mentor teachers along with continued proper support and learning opportunities. All work provided by the program provider must align with and assess candidate performance to the Rhode Island Beginning Teacher Standards (RIBTS) and subject content standards. Candidates participating in our non-traditional programs must:

- Receive high quality professional development that is sustained, intensive, and classroom-focused in order to have a positive and lasting impact on classroom practice, before and while teaching;
- Participate in a program of intensive supervision that consists of structured guidance and regular on-going support for teachers or participate in a teacher mentoring program;
- Assume functions as a teacher only for a specified period of time not to exceed two years under a temporary provisional certificate and;
- Demonstrate satisfactory performance for full certification as prescribed by the RI Department of Education.

An effective non-traditional certification program facilitates faster preparation of teacher candidates so that qualified candidates can be placed in teaching positions, avoiding emergency waivers when ever possible. However, such a streamlined program must be, above all, rigorous in its expectations. The mentor teacher, school principal, and higher education supervisor must provide deep support that is well coordinated with program curricula and ongoing professional development for the candidate participating in a non-traditional certification program.

PURPOSES OF NON-TRADITIONAL CERTIFICATION PROGRAMS

The general purposes of the non-traditional certification program for teachers in Rhode Island are:

- To meet the increasing demand for qualified teachers in documented high need areas;
- To provide rigorous, high-quality training and support that prepares candidates without previous teaching experience or pedagogical study to become effective classroom teachers at the proficiency level of the Rhode Island Beginning Teachers Standards (RIBTS); (*see attached standards*)
- To attract qualified candidates for teaching from business, industry, military, or other career environments who have the appropriate subject matter background;
- To attract greater numbers of qualified candidates for teaching from diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds.

ELIGIBLE PROVIDERS

A collaborative partnership is required between an approved school district(s) and an approved institution(s) of higher education in order to offer a non-traditional certification program. Institutions of higher education may offer non-traditional programs in certification areas in which they have RIDE approved programs. RIDE will review and grant approval of non-traditional programs as proposed by the higher education provider and the approved school district(s) through the program approval process.

An approved school district is a district that has implemented a quality-mentoring program for new teachers that also includes a clearly defined separate component for supervising candidates who hold the temporary provisional certificate through the non-traditional program. The RI Department of Education will review and approve local school districts' supervisory program based on the Quality mentoring Standards adopted by the Board of Regents. Approved districts that partner with an approved institution(s) of higher education will be granted authority to employ candidates participating in a non-traditional certification program who have successfully completed an intensive summer program. The approved school district through the collective bargaining process, depending upon their contracts, may be required to negotiate issues of pre-employment and filling positions with non-traditional program candidates.

Approved institutions of higher education an/or collaborations of higher education institutions are those institutions with educator preparation programs that:

- Have entered into formal collaborative relationship with an approved school district.
- Agree to provide an intensive summer program, including a field experience component that assesses candidate performance in components of the RIBTS that would suggest readiness to enter the classroom.
- Agree to provide clinical/supervising faculty to support candidates in non-traditional programs and to work with mentors to support candidates to perform to the RIBTS during the field experience.
- Agree to provide clinical/supervising faculty to work with school district administrators in the evaluation and assessment of candidate performance to the RIBTS during the field experience.
- Agree to provide candidates with the necessary course work as determined by staff at the RI Department of Education to complete their individualized plan.

CERTIFICATION AREAS

Non-traditional certification may be sought for areas where documented shortages currently exist or are projected to exist. Documented shortage areas are those subject areas and special education areas for which a sufficient supply of fully certified teachers is not available to meet the needs of the State. The RI Department of Education will publish an annual list of designated shortage areas. This list will be based on an annual survey of local school districts in Rhode Island. The superintendent may propose a shortage area that is unique to a particular school district. The final determination of such a shortage area will be made by the Rhode Island Department of Education.

Individuals who wish to make themselves available to be in a pool of candidates for placement in shortage areas may engage in the summer program without a “commitment of employment”, but must meet all the other criteria and are subject to all other requirements once engaged in employment.

ADMISSION CRITERIA

To be eligible for admission to the program, a prospective teacher must have:

- A minimum of a bachelor’s degree from an accredited institution with a major in, or closely related to, the intended teaching field.
- A minimum grade point average of “B” (3.00 on a 4.00 scale) in undergraduate studies, or the same average in at least 24 semester hours of graduate study.
- At least three years of career experience in an area related to the desired certification area.
- Received an individualized plan from the RI Department of Education. An individualized plan is the result of an analysis of a candidate’s professional experience and academic record by staff at the RI Department of Education. The plan outlines the additional academic requirements that the candidate needs to complete to secure certification in his/her subject field prior to completion of the non-traditional certification program. The plan may be modified in service based upon the supervising higher education faculty and school administration suggestions.
- A passing score on Praxis I PPST (or state-mandated skills test).
- Documented experience with children and/or young adults.
- A completed application which includes reflective essay, a resume, official transcripts of all college study, and three letters of recommendation.
- A successful interview by the collaborative partnership.

PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

Non-traditional beginning teachers must successfully meet the following requirements before they can be issued provisional certification in Rhode Island:

- Successful completion of an intensive summer program that assesses candidate performance to the “readiness to teach” standards of the RIBTS with a minimum of 200 contact hours to include experience and instruction in teaching methods, growth and development, microteaching, classroom teaching, law and regulations and reflective practice in teaching.
- Successful completion of at least one year of teaching experience that is verified by the approved school district and the approved institution of higher education.
- Successful completion of an individualized plan that is verified by staff at the RI Department of Education staff.
- Successful completion of the State Licensure Exam.

SITE-BASED PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

In order to meet the one-year teaching requirement, those prospective teachers who have successfully completed the summer training requirements and have a “commitment of employment” will be issued a one-year temporary provisional certificate. Candidates must be hired (may be employed as a full time permanent substitute) by an approved school district that has a collaborative partnership with an approved institution of higher education. The approved school district through the collective bargaining process must negotiate issues of pre-employment of non-traditional program candidates. The one (1) year temporary provisional certificate may be renewed for a second year in the event that the candidate has not met the RIBTS and the individualized plan has not been completed.

The collaborative providers will ensure the following:

- 1. A mentor teacher will be assigned by the district to support the non-traditional teacher throughout the year. The supervising teacher must be well trained in the RIBTS and have demonstrated past success and effectiveness as a cooperating teacher with undergraduate student teachers. Ideally, the supervising teacher would also be a clinical faculty member.*
- 2. Continuing support will be provided to the non-traditional teacher through regular support meetings with the supervising teacher, school principal, and higher education advisor (i.e., the collaborative support team).*
- 3. Guided reflective sessions will be arranged for the non-traditional teacher with highly skilled and successful teachers.*
- 4. A professional individualized plan will be developed with designated learning activities, needed resources, and timelines. Assessment of individual progress to date and expected evidence of future progress will also be indicated in the plan.*
- 5. A well-designed assessment process will be developed that provides evidence the non-traditional teacher has met the RIBTS.*

ASSESSMENT

The RIBTS portfolio will be a centerpiece throughout the assessment process as will the professional growth plan. Both the individualized plan and the portfolio will be in the stage of development and refinement throughout the non-traditional program. At the end of the teaching experience, the teacher will demonstrate to the members of the collaborative support team the ability to meet the RIBTS in a classroom setting before being recommended for a provisional certificate.